

## **Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry by Mildred D. Taylor Building Background Knowledge**

**Links for this worksheet can be found at:**  
<http://roll-of-thunder-d.wikispaces.com/>

**Book Summary:** The Mississippi of the 1930s is a hard place for a black child to grow up in and Cassie finds it difficult to understand why the farm means so much to her father. But she begins to reach a painful understanding when she witnesses the hatred and destruction around her and learns when it is important to fight for a principle even if it brings terrible hardships. - Puffin Books

### **SECTION ONE: Mildred D Taylor, Author**

*Click the link on the page to open the article about the author, then answer these questions. (You will only need to use the first 9 paragraphs of the article.)*

1.1 Mildred D Taylor was born \_\_\_\_\_ 13, \_\_\_\_\_

1.2. How old is she now? \_\_\_\_\_ (2012 minus 1943)

1.3. She was born in the city of \_\_\_\_\_, in the state of \_\_\_\_\_.

**Scroll down to the section in the article called "Family:." Look at the second paragraph.**

1.4. Taylor was inspired in large part by \_\_\_\_\_ of her family.

1.5. Many of Taylor's works are set in \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

1.6. \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, and \_\_\_\_\_

were part of the everyday experience of many black families.

1.7. When her family returned to the South to visit, they saw signs that said \_\_\_\_\_

ONLY and \_\_\_\_\_ NOT ALLOWED. (Look for the CAPITAL LETTERS)

1.8. One summer, she suddenly felt a \_\_\_\_\_ [sickness] as they  
crossed the Ohio River into Kentucky. (end of paragraph 5 under **Family**).

\_\_\_\_\_

1.9. Why did she have this feeling? \_\_\_\_\_

11.0. Her father told her that without understanding the \_\_\_\_\_ of \_\_\_\_\_ in the South, they couldn't appreciate the liberty of the North.

1.11. When she was ten and went to a school where she was the only black child, Taylor felt the "pressure of being \_\_\_\_\_". She felt that "what she did reflected not only upon herself but upon her \_\_\_\_\_ and upon her \_\_\_\_\_".

***Go back to the wiki and click on the link for Amazon.com.***

1.12. What are the titles of two books other than *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* that Mildred D. Taylor has written?

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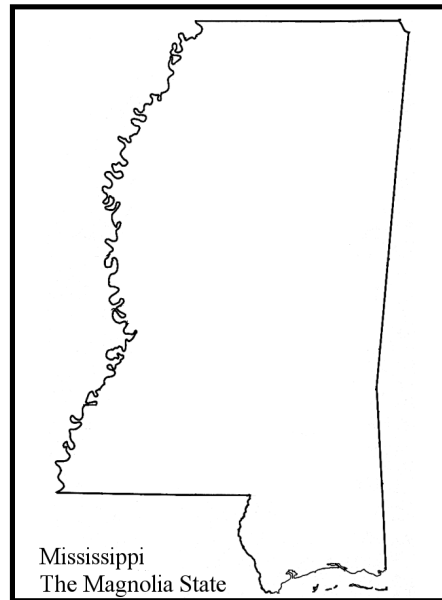
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## **SECTION TWO: Mississippi**

***Click the link on the page to go to Google Maps. In Google Maps, search for Mississippi.***

2.1. The capitol of Mississippi is Jackson which is right in the middle of the state. What 2 major highways is it at the intersection of? \_\_\_\_\_

2.2. On the map below, draw the two major highways and label where Jackson is.



2.3. On the Google map, follow the main East/West Highway to the west and locate Vicksburg. (This is where the family went to market.) Label it on your map above.

2.4. Use the “Get Directions” feature of Google maps to find out how far it is from Long Beach, CA to Vicksburg, MS. \_\_\_\_\_

2.5. Circle the area of the United States that Mississippi is in.

North

South

East

West

### **SECTION THREE: Slavery and the “N” Word**

*Click the link on the page to go to the article on Slavery. Scroll down the page to the heading called*

***“Slavery in the United States” and answer questions 3.1 through 3.5 below.***

3.1 Slavery flourished more in the South than in the North because the South had large plantation that grew cotton, tobacco, and other crops which required \_\_\_\_\_.

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3.2 By the 1860’s, the slave states had about 4 million slaves which made up nearly \_\_\_\_\_ of the South’s population.

3.3 Only about \_\_\_\_\_ of the region’s whites owned slaves or belonged to a family that owned them.

3.4 Members of the Pro-Slavery Movement used three reasons to justify owning slaves. Some said slavery reflected the “law of nature” that permitted the \_\_\_\_\_ to rule the \_\_\_\_\_.

Others insisted that the \_\_\_\_\_ supported slavery. Others claimed the Southern slavery provided blacks \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ than they would have had in Africa.

3.5 During the 1800’s, what did most plantation slaves were \_\_\_\_\_ who planted and picked \_\_\_\_\_.

***Scroll to “Effects of Slavery”***

3.6 After the Civil War, \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ of \_\_\_\_\_ prevented most former slaves from obtaining a good job.

***Read the information about where the word “nigger” came from, click on the link and read Mildred D Taylor’s acceptance speech, then answer question 3.8.***

3.8 In the acceptance speech, Taylor says that she understands that the “n” word is hurtful and offensive. However, she says she used it because she “had to be true to the feelings of the people about whom she writes and true to the stories told. Her stories might not be ‘politically correct,’ so there will be those who will be offended, but as we all know, \_\_\_\_\_ is \_\_\_\_\_.”

**SECTION FOUR: Discrimination**

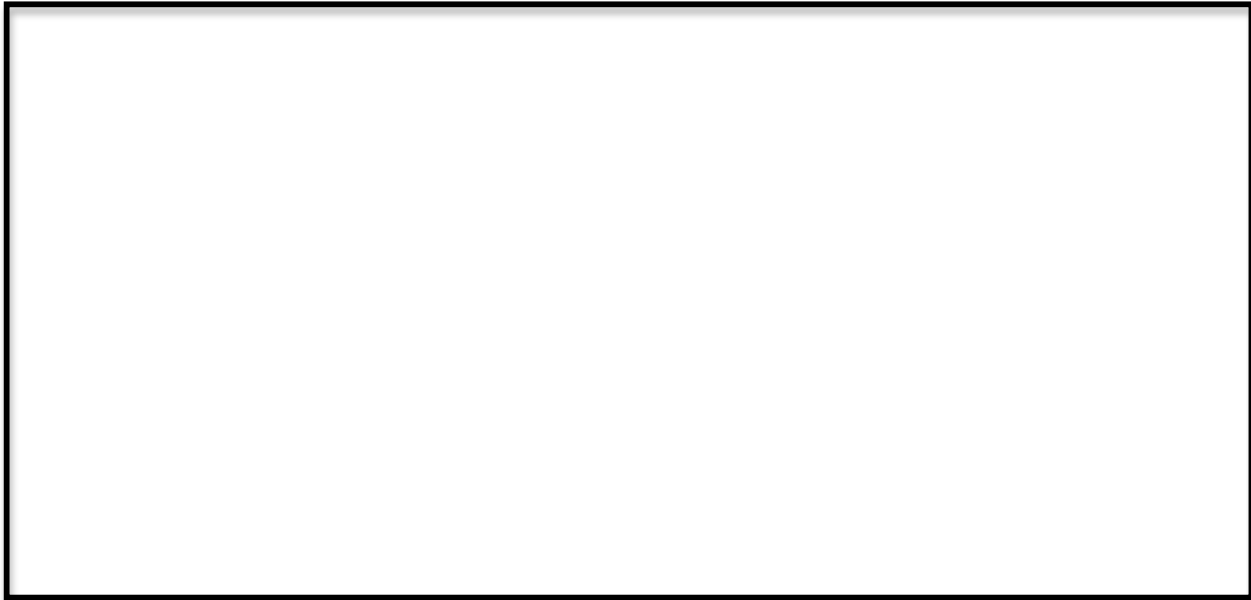
***Look at the definitions of discrimination, Black Codes, and Jim Crow laws in the middle of the page.***

4.1. Jim Crow laws were intended to create an entire legal system to \_\_\_\_\_ the races in every aspect of \_\_\_\_\_.

4.2. Black Codes imposed heavy penalties of \_\_\_\_\_,  
\_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_,  
\_\_\_\_\_.

***Look at the pictures on the page of the wiki and read the poem by Countée Cullen.***

4.3. In the box below, write or draw your reaction. (Think about a time when someone called you a name or you called someone else a name and how that feels.)



**SECTION FIVE: Lynching**

5.1. The Ku Klux Klan (the people in the hoods in the picture) was a secret organization that aimed to \_\_\_\_\_ the newly acquired \_\_\_\_\_ of \_\_\_\_\_.

5.2. Why do you think this organization existed?

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***Read the poem on this page called *Strange Fruit*. The poet was inspired to write it after he saw the photograph on the page of the lynching in Marion, Indiana in 1930.***

***Click on the video link to hear the song sung by famous blues singer, Billie Holiday.***

5.3. What do you think the “strange fruit” is that’s referred to in the title?

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5.4. Why does the poet refer to it as “bitter”?

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***Click the link on the wiki to read about the murder of 14-year-old Emmett Till, then answer questions 5.5 through 5.10.***

5.5 Emmett Till was murdered in \_\_\_\_\_ (the year).

5.6 He was \_\_\_\_\_ years old.

5.7 He and several other black teenagers visited a store in \_\_\_\_\_, Mississippi.

5.8 Two white men kidnapped him because he \_\_\_\_\_ at a white woman.

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5.9 His mother wanted the coffin to be left open. She said, “Let the \_\_\_\_\_ see what \_\_\_\_\_ see.

5.10 Did the men who murdered him go to jail? \_\_\_\_\_

## **SECTION SIX: The Great Depression**

**Watch the video to answer these questions on The Great Depression. (Note that there's a transcript of the video below it.)**

6.1 In 1933, over \_\_\_\_\_ people were unemployed.

6.2. The area in the U.S.A. that was hit with several years of drought (no water) was called the \_\_\_\_\_ Bowl.

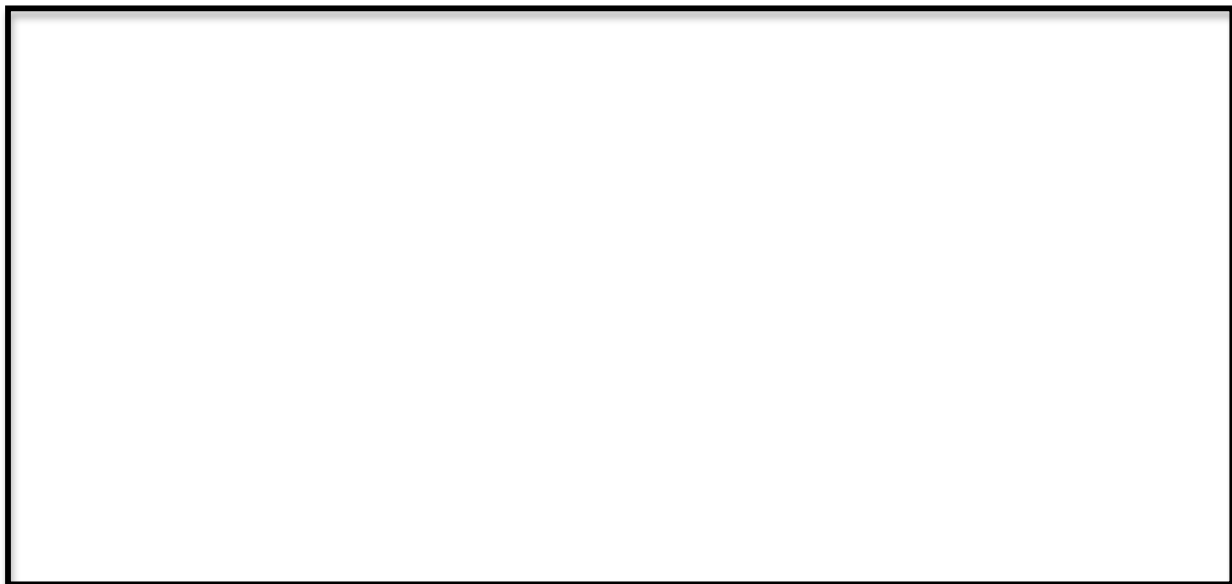
6.3. The camps of homeless people that sprang up in vacant lots and open spaces of cities were called \_\_\_\_\_.

**Now go to the wiki page and click on the link to the information article on The Great Depression.**

6.4. The Depression did not affect all groups equally. In most U.S. cities and in the South, unemployment rates were much higher for \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_.

6.5. \_\_\_\_\_ faced heightened discrimination. Many were \_\_\_\_\_ against their wishes.

6.6. Go back to the wiki page and click the link for photos of The Great Depression. Write or draw in the box below how they make you feel.



**SECTION SEVEN: Sharecropping and Cotton**

### ***Sharecropping***

7.1. A sharecropper was furnished with \_\_\_\_\_ and a \_\_\_\_\_.

He also received \_\_\_\_\_, fertilizer, \_\_\_\_\_, and other implements to \_\_\_\_\_ the land.

7.2. If the weather was poor or the price of the crop dropped, the sharecropper often wound up in \_\_\_\_\_.

### ***Cotton***

***Look at the picture on the page and then watch the video on picking cotton. (You only need to watch about 1 minute of the video. The song being sung during the video is a traditional folk song for picking cotton.)***

7.3. Cotton is picked in the middle of the summer where it's often in the 100's in the south. Think about the video you saw of people picking cotton. Then, in the box below, write or draw your thoughts about doing this for a living.

